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November 28, 2000

Commissioner Jane Henney
Food and Drug Administration
5360 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Commissioner Henney:

As a concerned consumer and citizen, I am writing this letter in regard to the genetically engineered Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH), approved by the FDA, and administered to cows to increase the production of milk. After learning about rBGH through various sources including the Organic Consumers Association, ABC News, and the petition to ban rBGH, it is apparent that the risks involved with rBGH have substantial consequences to humans, the health of bovines, and the economy. The following paragraphs highlight my main concerns with rBGH:

1) rBGH has been linked with cancer. Studies administered by Health Canada correlated rBGH with thyroid cysts and prostate activity in male rats. The Health Canada study concluded that further exploration should be required to determine the impact of rBGH on humans. I think it is logical to continue testing the hormone until we are absolutely certain it is non-carcinogenic.

2) The increased the amount of milk produced by each cow due to rBGH causes udder infections or Clinical Mastitis in bovines. The antibiotics used to treat Mastitis can stay in milk, causing a build up of the antibiotic resistance of bacteria, and also causing allergic reactions in some people. Not only does this inconvenience the cow, but it also harms the consumers of milk. I think the side effects of genetically engineered genes should be watched more closely. I am sure more people would share this opinion, if they only knew about rBGH.

3) The increased of production of milk triggered by rBGH could result in a surplus. A surplus would drive down the market price of milk lowering the income of family dairy farmers, and thereby, reducing the number of family-owned farms.

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4) Finally, rBGH is approved in the United States, but not in Canada, the European Union, New Zealand or Australia. Why does the United States declare rBGH is safe while other countries think the contrary?

Considering the implications of rBGH that I have mentioned, I think it is imperative that people are informed about rBGH. When unnatural means like a genetically engineered hormone are present in a widely consumed product, it is only fair the consumers of that product are informed of it. Failing to provide the public with knowledge about the endangering effects of a product is a highly unethical practice. Even if rBGH is not a cancer-causing agent, people should be aware of its' effect on bovine health, and the economy. It is the duty of the FDA to act in the interest of the public welfare by regulating the food available to people and informing them of possible health hazards. The FDA's lack of attention to rBGH is in breach of their duty to the public.

To prevent the possibility of harm, and to prevent leaving the public ignorant, I believe the FDA should label milk containers to disclose the usage of rBGH. The public has a right to be informed about such matters, and otherwise, the FDA is acting in disregard to both public health and consumer choice. Providing a label on milk containers is a simple remedy that at least allows the consumer to know that a milk product contains a genetically engineered hormone.

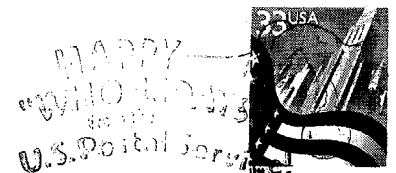
I would like to know why the FDA has denied the petition to ban rBGH, and why the FDA does not require a label for milk produced with the help of the Bovine Growth Hormone. Please respond at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shauna Matetich', with a stylized, cursive script.

Shauna Matetich

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Docket No: 98P-1194
Commissioner Jane Henney
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